The generations through which they have been exploited by their more powerful neighbours have left a stamp upon them and even educated men and women often allow themselves to be outdone in office and shop simply because they dislike to evoke contention. Often the faithful work of an individual does not bring the proper credit to the one earning it, for another steps in and takes advantage of his reticence to claim honour which he does not deserve.

In the old days retaliation for the exploitation they underwent at the hands of the Burmans would be taken by their striking back whenever they saw an opportunity. Small parties of Burmans who were caught in the Karen hills seldom returned alive. It was not because the Karens were worse than others or more given to atrocities, but simply that to them it was a way of getting what they thought was justice.

In their original condition they not only made forays against other races but were continually at feuds among themselves. The theft of a buffalo or a bronze drum, or the kidnapping of a child or a slave, was occasion for a foray. These usually went on and continued from bad to worse until villages were destroyed and many lives were lost. There were no other courts of justice.

The Karens felt the lack of the Book, as they called the Bible,—a need that contributed to what we now would call an inferiority complex. But like all people, either individuals or nations, that have an inferiority complex they were ready and waiting to be led out into greater freedom. They hailed the coming of the American Baptist missionaries as those who could help them to find themselves, to get their rights and to free themselves from the thraldoms into which they were conscious that they had

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appease the Lord of heaven and earth and to find out the guilty persons.

On the subject of stealing the exhortation of the elders was not to steal, destroy, defraud, or act dishonestly. Such deeds are by no means secret. Even though unconfessed, they become manifest in the ordeal by water and in that of ascending a tree. The God of heaven sees. The Lord of the mountains and hills, "Thi Hko Mü Xa," sees. If one is hungry, one should work, should bend the back. If one wants fish, one should use the hand-net. If one desires game, let one repair to the jungle for it. Families are to be fed in this way, not by stealing or by running into debt. 685 538

A person who had been caught stealing might be let off, if it was his first offense and he restored the stolen property and promised to reform. If, however, he became a confirmed thief, he was sold into slavery. In some parts of the Toungoo district it was not uncommon for one guilty of stealing to pay the penalty with his life. If positive proof was lacking and there was doubt as to his guilt, the ordeal by water was resorted to.

Murder was, of course, utterly condemned in the sayings of the elders, for "man is not like the beasts. He has a Lord and Master. We are the children of Thi Hko, of Y'wa who created us. Therefore, do not kill one another." The murderer will be surrendered to the Lord of the lands and will be put to death. He can not escape. His body will be left naked in the fields, and the vultures will devour it. "These things," the elders declare, "have we seen with our own eyes, and we know them, and they have often happened among us." However, the circumstances under which a murder was committed were taken into account. A homicide at a drunken feast was considered an accident, for it was thought that the one guilty of the crime would not have committed it had he been sober. No cause for an action existed in such a case. 682 538

Men killed while taking part in a foray were to be redeemed, that is, a fine was to be paid for them, unless the leader had been excused from such payment in advance.[4] Likewise, the accidental death of a man during a trading, hunting, or other trip undertaken at the request of another, was chargeable to the latter, because otherwise it would not have occurred. 761 672

The recognized way of bringing to justice an offender who was accused of causing the death of another, was for the near relatives 682 628

[4] See p. 157.

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682 628 of the latter to take active measures to avenge themselves. A dying father, whose condition was due to the assault of an enemy or who had suffered other injury, would charge his sons to avenge his wrong. The chief and the elders, recognizing the justice of the cause, would further it and join in to punish the guilty inhabitant of another village. As a precaution against a fatal accident or a secret murder, persons were not allowed to have in their possession dangerous poisons gathered from the jungle. Any one guilty of doing so was acting unlawfully and was condemned by the elders to be bound out in the hot sun for three days. He had also to destroy his store of poisonous herbs and to promise never to commit the offense again. After this he might be received again into the village, or he might be sold into slavery. If he was believed guilty of murder, his life was taken.

762 There appears to have been no law against suicide, and perhaps for this reason, as well as others, the practice was once common among the people. Nevertheless, voluntary self-destruction is regarded as an act of cowardice and, though not spoken of as displeasing to the spiritual powers, it prevented an honorable burial from being given to the one guilty of it. Hanging has been the usual method of committing the act among the Karens, while taking poison has been the common means of suicide among the Burmese. Incurable diseases, great disappointment, jealousy, and forcing a young woman to marry some one she dislikes, have been the usual causes of self-murder. Dr. Mason mentions a young man who was able to recall the occurrence of twenty-five suicides in a group of villages within a period of fifteen years. At the present time, probably on account of outside influences, such instances are rare indeed.

Inheritance regulations and customs are not definite or uniform
428 among the Karen; but usually property is divided among the children, the eldest being given a little more than the others and the youngest receiving a slightly smaller share. The widow has no legal right to anything, although she generally succeeds in retaining the use of more or less of the property during her lifetime. Should she marry again, even this quasi-right terminates. The second husband can not appropriate the property of the first, nor can his children share it.

000 It seems hardly necessary to comment on the worthy ideals and fundamental principles of human conduct embodied in the pre-

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CHAPTER XVI

WARFARE AND WEAPONS

Private Forays

628 787 701 Two or three generations have elapsed since the Karen in Lower Burma indulged in their old-time warfare, which consisted of forays secretly organized and carefully executed against their enemies. In the Toungoo Hills and in Karenni these raids have been suppressed only in recent years, as the regions named have been brought more fully under British rule. The people used to call such expeditions "ta hseh hsu ma beu," which means a strong and concealed thrust. A foray was undertaken by an individual to avenge a personal wrong committed by an inhabitant of another village. It was a recognized method of settling a grievance, like the sheriff's execution of the judgment obtained in a suit at law in a more civilized community. The conflict was not one between village and village, but between personal enemies. The man who inaugurated the foray set up his spear in the open space of his village and marked a white line half-way up on the spear shaft. Those who were ready to go on the expedition and renounce the right of their families to an indemnity in case they were killed, placed their marks above the half-way line, while those willing to join without making this renunciation added their marks below it. Of course, the chicken bones had to be consulted both as to the feasibility of the raid and a favorable time for it.

726 789 When this time had arrived, the organizer of the foray killed a hog or a fowl; took a bit of the heart, liver, and entrails; minced them together; added a little salt, and wrapped the mixture in a leaf. This talisman was then entrusted to two spies, who were to carry it to the village where the foe dwelt. They were admonished to note whether or not any spikes were planted along the paths leading to the place, the best means of access thereto, and the precise location and general arrangement of the village. Finally, they were to visit with the inhabitants there and find an opportunity of dropping the contents of their leaf into the food of their hosts. If they succeeded in this last stratagem, they were supposed to